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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 000867

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: NATO CONTACT REGIONAL REP BRIEFS ON
ASHGABAT MEETINGS

Classified By: CHARGE RICHARD E. HOAGLAND FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) Astana-based NATO Contact Regional Representative Tugay Tuncher briefed NATO-member embassies' chiefs of mission at a Turkish Embassy-hosted dinner on August 22 at the close of his three-day visit to Ashgabat. He met with Deputy Foreign Minister Hajiyevev and a deputy minister of defense. He said he found the foreign ministry much more engaged than the defense ministry.

¶2. (C) Tuncher said Turkmenistan accepted that a NATO experts team will visit Ashgabat in September for an annual program review to select NATO-Turkmenistan activities for the next year. Tuncher speculated the sides could engage on counter-narcotics and information-sharing and coordination on Afghanistan, specifically intel-sharing, for which a special NATO delegation will visit Ashgabat in January 2008.

¶3. (C) Tuncher said DFM Hajiyevev was positive about civil emergency planning, intel-sharing, border security, further PFP engagement, and education and training in general. He said President Berdimuhamedov has penciled in a November 5-7 visit to Brussels, and asked if the president would be able to meet the NATO Secretary-General.

¶4. (SBU) DFM Hajiyevev raised recent NATO overflight problems and commented, "Some countries don't want to follow the rules." However, according to Tuncher, Hajiyevev said Turkmenistan wants to be as flexible as possible to assist Afghanistan.

¶5. (C) During an August 20 lunch with Embassy Ashgabat's Acting DATT, Tuncher underscored that Turkey's relations with Turkmenistan are not especially close -- cultural ties exist but not much Turkish investment or official contact with the government.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: That DFM Hajiyevev was the more engaged of the two deputy ministers is not especially surprising. We judge that Foreign Minister Meredov is driving Turkmenistan's increasingly open-door foreign policy. That said, Turkmenistan will be most cautious about military cooperation because of its neutrality policy.

17. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: While Ankara and Ashgabat may not yet be especially close in diplomatic terms, Tuncher's comment about little Turkish investment in Turkmenistan is curious. Ankara-based Chalik Energy is a major, multi-sector investor, and Turkish companies have nearly cornered the construction market. Tuncher said he didn't consider Turkish construction dominance "investment." END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND